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WASHINGTON STATE BOARD OF HEALTH

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News Release

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Genetics conference explores legal, medical and policy issues

OLYMPIA — “Learning to Live with the Human Genome: Well-Reasoned Prudence or Future Shock?” is a daylong, Jan. 5 conference in Tacoma. Geared to health and legal professionals, the event will explore the medical, legal and public policy issues of human genetics.

Keynote speakers include Paul Billings, MD, PhD, and Lee Hartwell, PhD. Billings is an internationally renowned genetics pioneer, outspoken observer on issues of medical ethics, genetic privacy, and related matters, and founder of the leading Internet forum on genetics issues, www.GeneSage.com. Hartwell is Director Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center and nationally renowned genetics researcher.

State Supreme Court Chief Justice Richard Guy and State Board of Health Chair Linda Lake will open the conference. Specific sessions will address human genetics as it relates to discrimination, personal privacy, computer technology and more.

“The Human Genome Project and the near complete mapping of our genetic code has led to an explosion of facts about human health,” said Linda Lake. “This reality, in turn, has opened the doors to superior diagnostic tools, sophisticated medical treatment, and huge advances in courtroom evidence.”

Ms. Lake also stressed the urgency of initiating the education process about the Human Genome Project. Though potential uses of the initial draft of the human genome map are generating anxiety among ethicists and others, there may be both more than some hope and less than some fear to the issue.

Chief Justice Guy stated “the time is now to begin a careful public dialogue about the ramifications of the Human Genome Project. We must conquer our resistance to change and face issues about the genetic discoveries that are happening everyday. We can’t afford to wait.”

“Our goal is to explore these issues and many more,” Don Sloma, State Board of Health Executive Director said. “We hope this conference will begin a public dialogue that



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broadens participants' appreciation of the value and challenges posed by the mapping of the human genome."

Editors Note: For a conference agenda, contact Don Sloma at the state Board of Health, (360) 236-4110.
The genetics conference is sponsored by the state Board of Health, Department of Health, Department of Social and Health Services, Office of the Insurance Commissioner, state Supreme Court and University of Washington School of Public Health.